



WORLD LITERATURE I (ENG 251)

Virgil Study Guide

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VIRGIL'S LIFE -- (70-19 BC) -- A First Century Roman Citizen

Not much is known about Virgil's life. He was born in 70 BC and raised in a rural area near Mantua, Italy; he was well educated; his family farm was seized as a political spoil. From his thirty-first year on, Virgil lived either in Rome or near Naples, associated with his patron, Maecenas, Octavian's minister of internal affairs. Virgil was a court poet, whose well-being depended on pleasing powerful members of the ruling class. He evidently did this quite well, since Maecenas and other wealthy patrons supported him financially, allowing him to spend his life writing poetry.

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VIRGIL'S LATIN

A brief example of Virgil's Latin from the opening sentence of the Aeneid shows how the words are arranged more like a mosaic than in the linear fashion we are used to nowadays:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris

ARMS THE MAN AND I SING, OF TROY WHO FIRST FROM COASTS

Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit

TO ITALY BY FATE EXILED LAVINIAN AND CAME

litora

SHORES

Or, in normal English word order:

Arms I sing and the man who first from the coasts of Troy, exiled by fate, came to Italy and Lavinian shores.

In the Latin original, each word has a meaning that may not become clear until several more words have been read. This is an elegant, complex, literary language that does not end itself to translation.

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The Main Characters in the Aeneid are grouped below into five categories: Roman Deities; Greeks; Trojans; Tyrians; and Others

ROMAN DEITIES IN THE AENEID (and their Greek parallels, if any)

| | |
|---------|---|
| Allecto | a Fury who instills the poison of irrational rage into her victims, especially Amata and Turnus |
| Apollo | (same name in Greek) sun god; son of Jupiter and Latona; the god of prophecy; brother of Diana |
| Cupid | (Eros) son of Venus |
| Diana | (Artemis) goddess of the moon, the hunt and the woods; daughter of Jupiter and Latona; sister of Apollo |
| Iris | rainbow goddess; Juno's messenger |
| Juno | (Hera) wife and sister of Jupiter; daughter of Saturn; god of marriage; chief goddess of Carthage; hates Trojans because of Judgment of Paris |
| Jupiter | (Zeus) chief deity; husband and brother of Juno; son of Saturn |
| Lares | household, hearth-centered, ancestral gods, which Aeneas brings along with the Penates from Troy to Italy; these, along with the Penates, are small enough for Anchises to carry while Aeneas carries him |
| Penates | household gods or gods of the state; Aeneas brings the Trojan state gods with him from Troy to Italy |
| Mars | (Ares) god of war; son of Jupiter |
| Mercury | (Hermes) messenger |
| Minerva | (Athena)-goddess of wisdom, battle and household arts such as weaving |
| Neptune | (Poseidon) god of the sea; brother of Jupiter; helped build the walls of Troy, but King Laomedon, Priam's father, refused to pay him, so he became an enemy of Troy |
| Saturn | (Chronos) previous chief god; father of Jupiter, who deposed him |
| Venus | (Aphrodite) mother of Aeneas and of Cupid; goddess of love; she constantly worries about her son Aeneas, despite Jupiter's assurances that he will be fine |
| Vulcan | (Hephaestus) husband of Venus, god of the forge and fire |

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GREEK CHARACTERS IN THE AENEID: (few and nasty)

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|---------|---|
| Pyrrhus | son of Achilles, also named Neoptolemus; during the destruction of Troy, he killed a son of Priam and Hecuba in front of their eyes, and then killed Priam at his own altar; he also captured their daughter Andromache, Hector's widow, as his concubine |
| Sinon | a deceitful Greek who pretended to flee from the Greeks to the Trojans, told lying tales about the Trojan Horse and how, if it were taken into Troy, Troy could not be taken; he then released the soldiers from inside the Trojan Horse to destroy Troy |
| Ulysses | (Odysseus)- the treacherous fellow who devised the Trojan Horse that destroyed Troy; a brilliant, cruel, self-seeking manipulator |

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TROJAN CHARACTERS IN THE AENEID:

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|------------|---|
| Aeneas | Trojan prince, son of Venus and Anchises, father of Ascanius, lover of Dido, ancestor of the Roman people |
| Anchises | Aeneas' father; carried by Aeneas from fallen Troy |
| Andromache | widow of Hector, captured at fall of Troy by Pyrrhus; eventually married Helenus |
| Ascanius | (also Iulus) son of Aeneas and Creusa |
| | |

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|-----------|--|
| Camilla | female warrior, ally of Turnus in Latium |
| Creusa | Aeneas' wife who dies during the flight out of Troy |
| Euryalus | Trojan warrior; friend of Nisus; killed during a brave sortie with Nisus after killing many Latin enemies; Nisus and Euryalus became a model of loyal, brave friendship |
| Hecuba | queen of Troy, wife of Priam |
| Helenus | a son of Priam; a prophet; eventually married the widowed Andromache and became king in Epirus |
| Laocoon | Trojan priest; tried to warn the Trojans about the Trojan horse by thrusting a spear against it; killed by serpents |
| Nisus | Trojan warrior; friend of Euryalus; killed during a brave sortie with Euryalus after killing many Latin enemies |
| Priam | king of Troy; killed by Pyrrhus |
| Polydorus | Trojan who was treacherously killed by the king of Thrace; buried under a bush which bled when Aeneas tried to tear off a branch; his ghost warns Aeneas to flee from Thrace |

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■ TYRIAN CHARACTERS IN THE AENEID:

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|----------|---|
| Anna | Dido's sister; encouraged Dido in her affair with Aeneas |
| Dido | queen and founder of Carthage, widow of Sychaeus; falls in love with Aeneas; kills herself when he leaves; also called Elissa |
| Sychaeus | Dido's dead first husband; they are reunited in the Underworld |

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■ OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE AENEID (in Italy):

| | |
|---------|---|
| Amata | queen of Latium; wife of Latinus; mother of Lavinia; wanted Turnus to marry Lavinia |
| Evander | a good Greek; Aeneas' ally; founder of Pallanteum; father of Pallas |
| Latinus | king of Latium, husband of Amata, father of Lavinia |
| Lavinia | daughter of Amata and Latinus; loved by Turnus; destined to be Aeneas' wife to join the two warring peoples (Trojans and Latins) in peace |
| Pallas | young warrior, son of Evander, ally of Aeneas, killed by Turnus |
| Sibyl | Apollo's priestess; guides Aeneas into the Underworld where he meets his dead father and learns the future of the Roman race |
| Turnus | king of the Rutulians; heads opposition to Aeneas in Italy; wants to marry Lavinia; kills Pallas; killed by Aeneas |

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■ THE STORY

Virgil deliberately patterned the Aeneid on the Odyssey and the Iliad. The first half of the Aeneid (books 1-6) adapts the plot of the Odyssey: the fall of Troy, hostile gods, lengthy wandering, woman troubles, the underworld, seeking home. The second half (books 7-12) mirrors the wrath and warfare of the Iliad.

- Book 1: Aeneas, a prince of Troy is struggling to find his ancestral homeland, but Juno opposes him. She hates the Trojans because of the Judgment of Paris, which insulted her beauty, the theft of Helen, which violated Juno's position as the goddess of marriage, and the future fall of Carthage, her favorite city. After seven years of confused wandering, Aeneas has gotten near his goal of Italy, but Juno interferes. She arranges for a storm to drive him toward North Africa and Carthage. Dido, founder and queen of Carthage welcomes Aeneas and his companions. Although Jupiter assures Venus that her son Aeneas will prevail and found the Latin race in Italy, Venus is a worrier, so she sends Cupid to poison Dido with love for Aeneas, so she will not harm him.
- Book 2: Dido is gracious to Aeneas and his companions and interested in the story of the fall of Troy. Aeneas tells her how the Greeks created the deception of the Trojan Horse and how the gods confused the Trojans when a priest, Laocoon, struck the Trojan Horse with his staff and was promptly devoured by serpents. A treacherous Greek, Sinon, released the Greeks from the Horse, now inside the city of Troy, and the slaughter began. Aeneas relates the final battle, and his furious fighting until his mother Venus revealed to him that the gods themselves were destroying Troy and instructed him to leave Troy with his father (Anchises), son (Ascanius) and the household gods of his family and of Troy. While fleeing Troy, Creusa, Aeneas' wife was parted from them and killed.
- Book 3: Aeneas tells Dido how his band of Trojans searched for a new Troy. First they went to Thrace where they encountered the Trojan Polydorus in the form of a bleeding bush that warns them of treachery. They perform funeral rites for Polydorus and quickly leave Thrace. Next they travel to an island where a prophetic voice advises them to "seek out your ancient mother." However, they don't know for sure where that is. Anchises thinks it's Crete, where they try to found a city, but soon they start dying of pestilence.

The household gods appear to Aeneas to tell him that Italy is their true ancient mother. Then they encounter the horrid Harpies in the Strophades. Caelano, a Harpy prophetess of sorts, warns them that when they get to Italy, they'll be so hungry they'll eat their plates. Next they land at Actium in N.W. Greece, where they hold Trojan Games. After this, they sail to Buthrotrum, where the Trojan Helenus, Apollo's priest, directs them to Italy, but first Aeneas must go to the Cumaean Sybil and the Underworld. They safely pass through the Sicilian Ulyssesland: Cyclop's island, Skylla and Charybdis. But before they can reach their goal of Italy, Anchises dies and then the storm, concocted by Juno, drives them to Africa. So here they are in Carthage.

- Book 4: The Dido Affair. Dido had been married to a Tyrian, Sychaeus, who was treacherously killed by her brother. Dido fled Tyre with a band of followers and came to North Africa, where she acquired land to found the city of Carthage. Poisoned by Cupid, Dido fell madly in love with Aeneas, which conflicted with her vow to her dead husband Sychaeus to remain faithful to him. Juno and Venus cooperate, each thinking to further her own cause. Juno wants to keep Aeneas from founding Rome, which will eventually conquer Carthage; Venus wants to keep her son safe from Dido's potential treachery. So, Juno and Venus set up the "marriage." Dido and Aeneas are out hunting, there is a storm, they seek refuge in a cave. Here they mate, while Juno sets off lightning and nymphs cry out. Dido calls it marriage; Aeneas does not.

The lovers are negligent of their duties; Dido ceases working on her city; Aeneas forgets his destiny. Finally, Jupiter sends Mercury to chide Aeneas about his neglected duty to his son and their future descendants in Italy. Immediately dutiful to the will of the gods and Destiny, Aeneas secretly arranges his departure. When Dido discovers that he is leaving, she begs him to stay. He cannot, will not, so she raves and rages, curses the Trojans and kills herself on a pyre heaped with Aeneas' belongings and items of witchcraft. Meanwhile, Aeneas and the other Trojans are in their boats sailing away.

- Book 5: This book is the prelude to the world of the dead. First, Aeneas goes back to Sicily where he arranges Memorial Games for Anchises, who has been dead for a year. Here, Aeneas displays his skills as a leader, carrying out rituals, presiding at the games, encouraging his men, restraining anger, preventing injuries. Meanwhile, Juno has been biding her time. She sends her messenger, Iris, to inflame the Trojan women with fury, encouraging them to burn the Trojan ships so they will not have to travel any further. A torrential rain saves all but four of the ships. Aeneas leaves the reluctant behind; the remaining Trojans continue on toward Italy and the underworld.
- Book 6: The Cumaean Sibyl gives prophecies about Aeneas' future in Italy and leads Aeneas into the underworld. Unlike Homer's dim and wretched Hades, Virgil's Hades is a place of remediation and rebirth, where the lifetime deeds of the dead are examined and judged. They are chastised, as need be, punished and purged until they are purified. Then these cleansed souls can wander happily in Elysium, the groves of blessedness, until after a thousand years it is time to be reborn. Aeneas meets the shade of his father Anchises in Elysium, where Anchises tells him about the World Soul and rebirth, and shows Aeneas a procession of his descendants over twelve centuries, culminating in Augustus. Aeneas now knows his Destiny--to found the Roman people.

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The second half of the Aeneid, Books 7-12, tells the story of the escalating wrath inspired by Juno that forces Aeneas to go to war in Italy.

- Book 7: Aeneas finally arrives in Latium, where he is welcomed by King Latinus, whose only child is Lavinia. A powerful neighbor, Turnus, King of the Rutulians, wants to marry Lavinia, but omens and oracles have foretold that a stranger would become her husband, so Latinus is willing to marry his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas. Juno is not ready to give up her struggle against Destiny, although she knows she cannot win. She fetches the Fury Allecto from the underworld and urges her to stir the Latins into frenzy. Allecto instills poisonous rage into Amata, Lavinia's mother and into Turnus, Lavinia's suitor. Then she sets up Ascanius (Iulus) to shoot a pet deer belonging to Sylvia, a local peasant girl; Allecto blows her hellish horn, stimulating the local farmers to attack the Trojans. Latinus tries to avoid the conflict, but Juno opens gates of war. Lines of alliance are drawn and the troops start to gather.
- Book 8: Aeneas travels to the king of the Arcadians, Evander, seeking alliance. Evander welcomes him, introduces him to the ancient rural piety of the region, and offers Aeneas troops led by his own son Pallas. Meanwhile, Venus persuades her husband Vulcan to make new armor for Aeneas. The shield portrays critical moments when Rome was saved. At the center of the shield is the Battle of Actium. As in the underworld, where the procession of descendants leads from Aeneas to Octavian, the shield connects the beginning of Roman history in Aeneas to its culmination in Octavian's decisive battle at Actium that finalized the Augustan peace.
- Book 9: Here, the battle goes on at Trojan Camp; Aeneas has not yet returned from seeking alliances. Two best friends, Nisus and Euryalus, foray into the sleeping enemy camp and slaughter many before being killed themselves. Ascanius gets his first real taste of battle and kills his first man, Numanus. Turnus gets into the Trojan stockade and rages furiously, slaughtering men. Finally the Trojans rally and Turnus, exhausted, jumps into the river and escapes.
- Book 10: Jupiter wants peace, but Juno and Venus are still bickering, so he lets the battle continue, since "the Fates will find their way." Finally Aeneas returns with numerous allies. Turnus and Aeneas both rage in battle. Pallas fights bravely, but is finally killed by Turnus, who strips off Pallas' heavy decorated belt as a trophy. Juno recognizes by now that it's about over, but begs Jupiter to let her spare Turnus' life for a little while. He agrees and Juno fashions a phantom resembling Aeneas which lures Turnus out of the battle onto a ship which then drifts away carrying the bewildered Turnus to safety while the battle continues without him.
- Book 11: Aeneas learns that Pallas has died, and he prepares to send him back to his father for his funeral. Both sides bury their dead. The Latins hold a quarrelsome council over whether or not to sue for peace. King Latinus wants to make peace and share his land and rule with the Trojans. Turnus is in favor of continuing the war, which resumes. Camilla, a woman warrior ally of Turnus, enters the fray, fights bravely, and is killed.
- Book 12: Turnus challenges Aeneas to a duel that will settle the war. Meanwhile, Juno tells the nymph Juturna, Turnus' sister, to help him if she can, because Turnus is no match for Aeneas in single combat. Juturna provokes the Latins into general battle. Aeneas seeks Turnus, but Juturna, disguised as Turnus' charioteer, races around, not letting Turnus stop and fight. Aeneas is now furious. He starts to burn down King Latinus' city, to root out the resistance once and for all. Queen Amata hangs herself. Turnus tells his sister to stop interfering, because fate has won, and he wants to fight Aeneas honorably before he dies.

Turnus and Aeneas begin to duel, and Jupiter holds up his scales to confirm their fates. Turnus' sword breaks; he panics and runs away, Aeneas pursuing. However, gods are still interfering. Juturna hands the fleeing Turnus a sword, while Venus pulls Aeneas' spear free from a tree it had lodged in. Jupiter is fed up by now and confronts Juno, who finally gives up, asking only that the ensuing people be called Latins and the Trojans lose their identity. Jupiter agrees to create a single Latin race from the two warring peoples. Jupiter sends two Furies to chase Juturna away from Turnus, and Aeneas throws his spear, wounding Turnus. Turnus begs for his life, but Aeneas sees the belt of dead Pallas on Turnus and, enraged, kills Turnus. End of story.

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AENEAS--A NEW KIND OF HERO

Aeneas' dominant trait is piety. Piety for Aeneas did not mean faith so much as obedience and careful attention to the will of the gods, especially Jupiter, so that he could do the right thing in the right way. This piety expressed itself in right relations to the gods, to ones family, and to the state, as well as in carrying out rituals in a correct, thoughtful manner. Aeneas is:

| | |
|-------|---|
| Pious | Aeneas carries his household gods from Troy to Italy; he holds Memorial Games for Anchises; he immediately obeys Mercury's message to leave Dido. |
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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Steadfast | He feels Dido's grief, but is unmoved in his actions. |
| Compassionate | He stops the boxing match when Entellus is overwhelming Dares; he grieves for his dead soldiers. |
| Fair | He awards the prizes fairly during the memorial games. |
| Brave | He fights bravely at Troy, only stopping because Venus tells him to leave; he is equally brave combating Turnus in Latium. |
| Willing to cooperate with Destiny | He learns the future in the Underworld and acts willingly to bring it about. |
| Paternal | It is Aeneas' fatherly duty to Ascanius to leave Dido and found a new nation for his descendants. |
| A Leader | Aeneas soothes his weary followers after the storm, "our god will give an end to this as well"; he is concerned with feeding and comforting them; in Italy he forms alliances and leads the fighting. |
| Sensitive | When Dido asks him to tell about the fall of Troy, he tells her "O Queen--too terrible for tongues the pain/you ask me to renew"(II 4-5); he is exquisitely aware of the "tears of things," the pain of human life. |
| Emotional | Aeneas narrates the fall of Troy with great feeling, such as, "the first time savage horror took me" (II 751). |

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THE DIDO PROBLEM: Passion and Politics

Dido is not just a nice lady who has hard luck with love. Not only does Virgil explain that Cupid poisons Dido with love, but he also gives us plenty of hints about Dido's potential for danger to Aeneas, such as her fury when she is about to kill herself:

And could I not have dragged his body off, and scattered him
piecemeal upon the waters, limb by limb?
Or butchered all his comrades, even served
Ascanius himself as banquet dish
upon his father's table? [IV 826]

This sinister echo of how Atreus fed Thyestes' children to him does not suggest that poor Dido is merely upset over her disappearing lover. Indeed, Dido's funeral pyre itself is chock full of elements of witchcraft, not approved practice in Roman court circles.

However, Virgil also portrays Dido's love for Aeneas with such sympathy that readers appreciate her love, hate Aeneas for leaving her, and mostly ignore the negative undertone. Dido is largely modelled on two ancient, very bad women--Cleopatra and Medea in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius.

Cleopatra was the Egyptian queen who fought alongside Roman Mark Antony against Octavian at the Battle of Actium. Virgil presents her as the epitome of the decadent, treacherous Orient (as opposed to the noble Roman West). She and Antony are part of the center of the shield of Aeneas, with their barbarian troops and barbaric gods, opposing the true leaders of Rome and the household gods brought to Italy by Aeneas. At one level, Aeneas' affair with Dido is the crossing point--he has left the Orient (Troy), and is delayed by one last Oriental experience (decadent passion), before going forth to become the Latin ancestor of the Roman people.

Medea, in the *Argonautica*, fell quickly and madly in love with Jason and betrayed her father to please Jason, helping him through trickery and witchcraft to acquire the Golden Fleece. Afraid of her father's anger, Medea ran off with Jason; she also lured her half-brother Apsyrtus to Jason who killed him. This was just part of her notorious career as a passionate woman and a witch. A Roman reader would have recognized unpleasant echoes of Medea in Virgil's Dido.

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OTHER NEGATIVE PASSIONATE CHARACTERS

The other passionate characters in the Aeneid are mostly deplorable. The list is headed by the raging goddess Juno and the raging warrior Turnus. It includes the Harpies, Allecto, Amata, the Trojan Women burning their ships, and the Latins in general when in battle frenzy. Even Aeneas is touched by passionate fury twice: during the sack of Troy and during the battle in Latium, especially at the final moment when he kills Turnus. Passion spreads like a virus. Venus uses Cupid to infect Dido with the passion of love. Juno uses Allecto to infect Amata, Turnus and the Latin masses with the passion for war. In every case except for, perhaps, Aeneas' final passionate killing of Turnus, passion opposes the will of Jupiter, Destiny and Fate. This alone shows us how little Virgil approved of such intense emotion.

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GODS, THE WILL OF JUPITER, DESTINY/FATE

Jupiter knows and affirms fate. But there is also Destiny, the notion that there is a necessary future to strive towards. This is the fate that Jupiter upholds, a pattern that is not a simple working out of conflicts.

Juno and Venus act in opposition to the necessary path of the fates. They know perfectly well what must come to pass, because Jupiter tells them, but each has her own passionate agenda, one the irrational, intense love of a mother for her son, the other raw frenzied hatred of the Trojans whose descendants will destroy Carthage. They must both lose, but gracefully, as goddesses lose, finally accepting the will of Jupiter. Similarly, on a human level, Dido, Amata and Turnus resist the fates, acting counter to the will of Jupiter. They must be destroyed, just as Octavian destroyed Antony and Cleopatra.

Aeneas, who spends his life trying to do what he should, not only has many painfully confusing experiences as he misinterprets omens and follows wrong leads, but his final cooperation with fate leads him to relinquish every shred of personal happiness. He lost his beloved wife, his city, almost everything he cared about at Troy. He left his comfortable liaison with Dido. He will marry a woman he does not choose, whose people he has slaughtered; he will create the foundation for the next twelve hundred years of Roman history, but die still outside the promised land of Rome.

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